

Testimony of Norwalk River Watershed Association Before the Environment Committee

In Support of

AN ACT CONCERNING A LONG ISLAND SOUND RESOURCE AND USE
INVENTORY AND A LONG ISLAND SOUND BLUE PLAN

In Opposition to

H.B. 5417 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SEASON FOR THE TAKING OF GLASS
EELS

Submitted by Louise Washer, Vice President, Norwalk River Watershed Association

March 7, 2013

Senator Meyer, Representative Gentile, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 312, AAC a Long Island Sound Resource and Use Inventory and a Long Island Sound Blue Plan. I support this bill, which would help prevent potential conflicts among the many environmental, economic, and recreational uses of the Sound and its resources.

The Norwalk River Watershed Association has as its mission to improve the water quality and fish and wildlife habitats of the Norwalk River watershed and ultimately the LI Sound. Part of our mission is to encourage recreational use of the waterways in the seven watershed towns in CT (Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, New Canaan, Weston, and Norwalk) and NY (Lewisboro). We believe a Blue Plan would help us in our mission to protect the water quality. We support maintaining public access for boaters. We offer kayak tours and coastal cleanup events to engage the community and raise awareness about water quality issues. We use public access points for these events and more. We are very concerned about the negative effects of industrial projects on the wildlife and vegetation in the watershed and on the fish and aquatic life in the Norwalk River and the LI Sound. We oppose any underground pipelines or cables that might disturb the floor of the Sound which houses many spawning benthic fish species as well as oysters and lobsters.

There are mounting demands for use of Long Island Sound, from innovative aquaculture to energy projects, but Connecticut currently has no authority to comprehensively plan for these many uses. Proposals are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, robbing Connecticut of the ability to be proactive in securing the best future for the Sound. Too often, this leads to conflicts, as when the proposal to build the Broadwater natural gas facility in the middle of the Sound threatened to limit public access and spurred concern about impacts to wildlife.

SB 312 establishes a Blue Plan Advisory Committee, to include state agencies as well as representatives for the environment, marine trades, industry, municipal

leadership, and other stakeholders. It directs the Committee and the Office of Policy and Management to work together on an inventory of the Sound's resources and where and how they're used. This information would then be gathered in a comprehensive "Blue Plan" designed to protect traditional uses, plan for future uses, and prevent potential conflicts before they start. This is an essential step to protect the Northeast's largest estuary and its highly productive natural habitats, fisheries, and tourism economy.

Unfortunately, another bill before the committee today would threaten one of our aquatic resources. HB 5417 directs DEEP to establish a season for the taking of glass eels—the tiny juvenile American eels that mature in Connecticut's rivers before returning to the ocean to spawn.

Taking these eels is prohibited by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the EPA is currently considering listing American eels as an endangered species. Connecticut should not jump the gun by establishing a season for them before the EPA and the commission have made their decisions.

Please support SB 312 and oppose HB 5417. Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely,

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